

Was there agreement on the Chicago Freedom Movement Summit Agreement?

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Throughout learning about the Chicago Freedom Movement, I have discovered many new things about the civil rights movement that helped Chicago develop equality among African-American and minority residents and the work accomplished by some of the important leaders of the movement. A major subject that resonates over and over throughout the movement is the Summit Agreement. What exactly did the Summit Agreement state? And did the leaders at the time think that was a step toward equality for blacks?

What was the Summit Agreement? The Chicago Freedom Movement started in late 1965 and finished in early 1967. There were many great groups and leaders involved such as the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO), Martin Luther King, Jr., and Al Raby. Dr. King believed that nonviolent direct action could bring about social change outside the South. The Chicago Freedom Movement was concerned with housing, education, and inequality. The Chicago Freedom Movement declared “to end slums in Chicago.” It organized tenants’ unions, Operation Breadbasket, and rallied black and white Chicagoans to support its goals.

In late July 1966, the marches of the Chicago Freedom Movement began in all white neighborhoods on the Southwest and Northwest sides to protest unequal housing and redlining. After this, whites began to be angry. This began high level negotiations between city leaders, movement activists, and representatives of the Chicago Real Estate

Board. The culminating event of the Chicago Freedom Movement was launched to fuse the issues of housing, equality, and fairness for all residents of the city. This was the 1966 Summit Negotiations and Agreement to end unfair housing practices in the city of Chicago.

The Summit Agreement was put into place to ensure that governmental groups, the Chicago Real Estate Board, and other groups would work together towards fair housing for all residents of the city. The agreement also guaranteed that the Chicago Freedom Movement coalition pledge its resources to help carry out the programs outlined in the Summit Agreement and concede to the ending of neighborhood demonstrations on the issue of opening housing so long as programs of the summit agreement were being carried out. Many blacks believed the Summit Agreement was a “sellout”. They believed Dr. King and his campaign in Chicago had failed.

Despite the criticisms of the Summit Agreement, there were some good things that came about. Rev. Jesse Jackson stayed in Chicago and lead Operation Breadbasket which later became Operation Push. It also gave birth to the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities. This was a product of the Summit Agreement which attacked housing discrimination.

The Chicago Freedom Movement highlighted the tremendous problems that existed in Chicago. It also shaped the way Chicagoans live today. Even though many activists did not agree on the Summit Agreement they did realize it was a step toward equality. Despite the efforts of the Chicago Freedom Movement, residential segregation remains formidable (or the same) in Chicago which now remains the third most segregated city in America. [From “Launch to Improve Housing for Negroes,” *The*

Chicago Defender, June 4, 1966; “Program of the Chicago Freedom Movement,” July 1966; “The Summit Agreement: Report of the Subcommittee to the Conference on Fair Housing Convened by the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race,” August 26, 1966.]